

Minutes of the St. Thomas Aquinas Human Concerns Committee Meeting - September 20, 2017

Attendance: Mary Fong, Paul Chestnut, Ruth Chippendale, George Chippendale, Anne Fillin, Henry Organ, Terry Atkinson, Claire Collins

1. Faith-Sharing/Question of the Week

A prayer contributed by Terry McCaffrey:

For a greater understanding of the sacredness of life in the unborn, in the terminally ill and in the prisoners on death row, we pray...

2. Approval of July minutes

The minutes were approved.

OLD BUSINESS

2. Death Penalty

Terry McCaffrey was unable to attend, but he had sent a message with several parts:

- 1) He wrote a document called "A Call To Action" which is an urgent message to continue to work for the abolition of the death penalty. It is included below.
- 2) There will be a Service for Victims of Violence October 25th, 2017 at 7 PM St. John the Baptist Church, 350 South Abel Street, Milpitas, CA 95035 with Bishop McGrath presiding.
- 3) There will be a Rally at Lytton Plaza, starting at 2 PM on Saturday Oct. 7th.

In addition, Paul read from the current issue of Death Penalty Focus:

The California Supreme Court recently upheld Prop 66, the highly flawed death penalty initiative that passed in November, and opponents say it will make the state's already broken system even worse. Scott Dekraai, who confessed to killing eight people, and wounding another, will be sentenced to life in prison later this month, ending a six-year ordeal for victims' family members. Florida is executing inmates again, after a year-and-a-half hiatus; while Missouri's governor courageously granted a last-minute stay to a prisoner after a DNA test raised serious questions about his guilt. States including Arkansas, Alabama, and Ohio are scheduling executions, while Pennsylvania orders a re-sentencing hearing for a man who's been on death row for 30 years. We talk to a man who's written a book about a woman who spent 20 years on Texas's death row, and how she found redemption; and have a few books and articles on criminal justice to recommend.

Harvard's Fair Punishment Project released a study, "Prisoners on Ohio's Execution List Defined by Intellectual Impairment, Mental Illness, Trauma, and Young Age," that focuses on the 26 men the state plans to execute between now and 2020. It finds that "these men are among the most impaired and traumatized among us — a pattern replicated across America's death rows."

3. Crop Hunger Walk - October 8

Everything is coming along for the Hunger Walk.

4. South Bay Sanctuary Covenant

South Bay Sanctuary Covenant is planning an event on October 29 at 4 pm at First Congregational church, 1985 Louis Road. The speaker will be Jose Acosta, Executive Director of Voices on the Border. Anne Fillin is planning another trip to El Salvador in November.

NEW BUSINESS

5. Refugee Foster Care

Claire Collins from Catholic Charities came to our meeting to discuss the Refugee Foster Care Program. Currently there is a governmental ban on refugees into this country. Normally, there are about 76,000 refugees coming into the U.S. However, a large number of refugees from Central America are currently in this country, and the USCCB

(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) has an agreement with the government to find places for the many unaccompanied children among them. The USCCB has arranged with several agencies, including Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, to strive to find foster parents for these children.

“The Refugee Foster Care Program is devoted to providing long term quality care to unaccompanied refugee children in the Bay Area. We utilize a comprehensive model of service to ensure we are meeting the best interest of each client, and paving the way for them to thrive in our community.”

Claire suggested that our committee could provide a bridge to the Hispanic Community of Our Lady of the Rosary Church, with a view to finding families who would be willing to provide a temporary home for refugee children. We agreed to contact the community and try to set up a meeting.

6. Spirituality Tuesday event planning

Sister Maryann Cantlon was asked to present; she specializes in Restorative Justice. She was invited by Hong-Ha Vuong. She replied in the affirmative. She is available any Tuesday in April and May except for May 8.

7. What's On Your Mind?

Volunteers are needed for the South Palo Alto Food Closet. There is a great need for the fourth Monday of the month from 12 to 2 pm and for the fifth Monday of the month for both the 10 to 12 and 12 to 2 time slots.

On Wednesday, October 11, Seton School presents authors Ron Hansen and Tobias Wolff in Conversation.

Next meeting - October 18, 2017

A Call to Action

By Terry McCaffrey

The California Supreme Court's affirmation of PROP 66, with the caveat that the 5-year limit on appeals was not mandatory, is a wake up call for us.

As it stands, 18 persons have completed their appeals, and executions could start within a year. These results act as a call to action for death penalty opponents. We must now seriously join the battle to end the death penalty in California. Our goal must be to put together a campaign in which an electorate favors abolition of the death penalty by a percentage that is in the high 50's. We must also raise sufficient funds for a successful ballot initiative.

We need to bear in mind we are not starting from scratch. In 2016 over 5 million voters supported abolition of the death penalty. In large areas of the state a majority of voters supported PROP 62. For example in Los Angeles County 51.7% voted for PROP 62. Likewise, in the Bay Area 58.5% supported PROP 62.

In the short term we need to activate our base and launch a campaign to educate and win the hearts and minds of the public. Also, in the short term we need to hold our District Attorneys' feet to the fire and ensure that they do not seek the death penalty. This is particularly the case in Los Angeles, where the District Attorney is an ardent proponent for the death penalty.

Your support for our campaign is critical. There are short-term efforts that you can do to get the ball rolling:

- Write Letters to the Editor
- Voice your support in your religious services for abolition of the death penalty
- Win over high profile members of our community
- Attend rallies
- Attend California People of Faith chapter meetings
- Hold speaking events
- Establish a Speakers Bureau
- Tell your friends

And remember, the media is key.

